



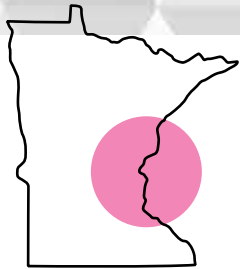
# *Glorious*

**THE EXPERTS DISH ON WHAT'S NEW  
IN FOOD AND BEVERAGE.**

# *Food*

BY MEGAN GOSCH & MORGAN HALASKA

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## HYPER LOCAL

### CHRISTIE ALTENDORF

Senior Event Planner, D'Amico Catering

"We rely on artisans, suppliers and foragers to bring us the best of the best each day so we can then in turn create the best for our clients. From honey to cheeses, free-range game to something as simple but beautiful as microgreens, we couldn't ask for better here in our great state. Some of our incredible partners include Ames Farm, Caves of Faribault, Shepherd's Way Farms, Riverbend Farm and Red Table Meat Company. ... We are who we are because they do what they do, and it's important to us that our clients know that."

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### KATE SIDOTI

Private Chef, Owner of Brim

"About 90 percent of our food comes to us from Shared Ground Farmers' Cooperative. They're a vendor that gathers all of the produce from Hispanic-, Hmong- or immigrant-run organic farms. It feels so good to be connected to the food we're serving in that way, it's just so much more personal on every level and you're getting something really fresh. For example, the Brussels sprouts we get in today were picked and cleaned yesterday and delivered to us, so within 24 hours it goes from the ground to your plate and you just can't season something enough to get that taste. It's an amazing thing that only comes from that unique partnership."

## Back to the Basics

### LINDSAY FRANK,

Conference Services Executive, Mystic Lake Casino Hotel • Vice President, Twin Cities National Association of Catering and Events (NACE)

"Many of the food trends that were popular in the 1940s-1950s are trending today: homemade meals with little to no preservatives/processed foods, local ingredients that people either grew themselves or shopped local for, cooking with whole ingredients in their natural form (non-GMO).

"There are definitely similarities from back then to today in how we eat. In 1940, eating local, nonprocessed food was extremely popular because it was the only option, which is exactly what we are seeing today. Although today an organic label in the store is going to cost you twice as much, people are willing to pay for the integrity of their food and know where it is coming from.

"We are seeing a huge shift to 'old fashioned' cooking—while the last few years have been heavily focused on fusion, molecular and mixology—traditional preparation methods are starting to trend. Fermentation, roasting, and slow cooking are all coming back. Vinegar flavors are starting to show up

all across the industry. Another huge menu-driven trend is housemade condiments—BBQ, ketchup, aged mustard, etc. Clients love it as it shows there are less processed items they are consuming."

### PAUL LYNCH

Corporate Director of Food and Beverage, Aimbridge Hospitality

"I'm an avid gardener. [At home] I have about an acre of land and a very good-sized vegetable garden, 14 fruit trees and a berry patch. I do a lot of canning every year. I probably put up over 500 jars every year from the fruits and vegetables and everything that comes out of my garden; there's nothing that I can't preserve by sugaring it, curing it, pickling it or canning it. [At the Hyatt Regency Bloomington-Minneapolis] we grow a specific type of cucumber that is a pickling cucumber, and with tomatoes, it's very easy to oven roast them and then preserve them in oil so that you can use them later in pasta or charcuterie. Swiss chard can be blanched and frozen."

### JOHN DOODY

Culinary Director and Executive Chef, Kelber Catering

"We're doing a lot in-house these days, including in-house pickling and quick pickles, relishes and salsas. We've also talked about ways to potentially include kimchi, which is a popular ingredient in Asian cuisine, on future menus."





# NEW FLAVORS & INFLUENCES

## CHRISTIE ALTENDORF

"We're really excited to see Minnesotans really expand their palates, both at home and in the culinary experiences they're seeking out. While a classic combination of tender filet and decadent potatoes will always be welcome and comforting, it is delightful to get to have conversations with clients about incorporating truly beautiful ingredients with a story behind them such as heritage breed pork, amazing vegan options like nut-based 'cheeses,' and really unexpected but specific spirits from different corners of the globe like whisky from Japan or schnapps from a small wine producing village on the Mosel.

"Other fresh ingredients that we're working to incorporate include microgreens in a variety of colors and textures, locally foraged mushrooms, European cheeses like Raclette and hibiscus dust.

"Our executive chef, Josh Brown, has a particular talent for taking traditional ingredients and combining them in innovative ways. The beet marinated halibut takes a traditional white, flaky fish and fuses it with a Minnesota staple crop, resulting in a plate that is alive with color and flavor in ways you wouldn't expect.

"The tuna Nicoise taco [pictured below] does something similar—it balances what is a familiar shape and presentation for most American palates while embracing a flavor profile that is inherently French. They're fun, beautiful, bite-size and full of fresh and beautiful ingredients."

## PAUL LYNCH

"I try to draw the influences from the heritage cuisines of Minnesota [at Urbana Craeft Kitchen & Market in Hyatt Regency Bloomington-Minneapolis]. Everybody thinks about the Scandinavian—and that's true that we have a full Scandinavian influence throughout Minnesota—but the largest settlers were actually Germanic, English and Irish. There are lot of examples on the menu where we take a heritage item and we put modern twists on it or reintroduce it. A good example is when I introduced the schnitzel to the menu and I thought it was just going to be a seasonal menu item, but it's become such a big success that we've kept it and we think it'll be a permanent fixture on our menu."



## Kelber Catering

**JOHN DOODY**  
*Culinary Director and Executive Chef*

**LISA ANDERSON**  
*Director of Sales and Marketing*

**JD:** "We're excited to work with black garlic, which is trending right now. It's a kind of fermented garlic that's actually quite nutritional and used quite a bit in Asian cuisines. We've played around with it and found a few ways to incorporate it on the new menu. We'll also be incorporating gochujang, which is like a Sriracha and is used in Asian dishes, but has a slightly different kind of heat."

**JD:** "An amazing trend we're continuing to see is the general awareness we have around food. With our rising foodie culture, the expectations are so much higher. People are seeking out new experiences and flavor profiles. It really pushes us to innovate and keep things fresh."

**LA:** "I'm laughing because thinking back 15 or 20 years, we'd put together events and the client would say things like 'We want it to be recognizable,' and now what's recognizable is considered to be so boring or safe. Times have really changed."



Tuna Nicoise Salad • D'Amico Catering

**Q&A WITH PRIVATE CHEF,  
PLANT-BASED CATERER  
AND OWNER OF BRIM:**

*Kate Sidoti*

**Why focus on plant-based cooking?**

When you're just using raw, organic, plant-based ingredients you can feel good about what you're serving. As a chef I prefer to cook from a daily perspective—creating meals that sustain you rather than dishes that are more like a treat and unhealthy to eat regularly—and that means I always need to be thinking of new ways to make food that's beautiful but healthy. I try not to repeat recipes so it's all about staying on your toes to keep dishes fresh.

**What kind of shift are you seeing in regards to general healthy eating?**

Gluten-free and paleo is asked for and appreciated a lot. It wasn't that long ago that restaurants didn't have gluten-free options. Now, people are starting to understand that there are major health effects to these allergens.

**Any specific ingredients clients or guests have requested?**

I'm getting a lot of questions about grain-free options, things like banana flour made from dried bananas or cassava flour. Those ingredients can open up a whole new world for those who need an alternative option.

**How do you approach catering from a health and wellness focus?**

When I'm cooking for events like yoga and health retreats, I'm able to create menus designed around a specific kind of therapy. So, if I'm cooking for a retreat focused on emotional release, where attendees will be working through some intense emotions, I'll focus on comforting, grounded, root-based recipes. My goal is to pair food with the experience and cook for your well-being based on seasons, stress levels, etc.

**Your new restaurant, Brim, serves plant-focused bowls. Do you have a mission for the restaurant?**

People know vegetables are something they need more of and, if they're seasoned and cooked right, they will. To make vegetables taste good, to help people eat and crave healthy foods—that's the goal. Eating healthfully doesn't have to be bland and boring.

**Have you seen a trend in your clients' health-focused goals?**

Many of our guests are shifting away from ingredients that cause inflammation such as sugar, dairy, and wheat. We try to include as much turmeric, ginger, matcha, reishi mushrooms, apple cider vinegar and colorful organic produce in our dishes as possible.



*Get Connected*

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## Small Budgets, Big Impact

**LEAH ANDERSON**

*Marketing Manager, Mintahoe Catering and Events*

“We’re seeing that companies are willing to spend more money on food to get higher quality, wholesome ingredients in their meals. The food and beverage industry is booming in Minnesota right now, and everyone is a ‘foodie,’ so our clients are really trying to impress their guests with serving more than the standard catered meal at their events, which means investing a bit more cash.”

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“While many people think that small budgets are more challenging to work with, oftentimes the opposite can be true. They present the challenge of stretching each dollar as far as it will go while still investing enough to support the purpose.

“Considering the structure of the event is important—does the event need to be heavy hors d’oeuvres focused, or can transforming it into a dessert reception with both decadent and refreshing items be an option? The words ‘event’ and ‘experience’ are interchangeable these days and tend to drive perceived value, so focusing dollars on exciting and interactive moments and then supplementing those with cost-effective options can be a great way to strike balance between value and impression.

“I’m a big fan of a high-impact moment upon arrival, one or two during the event and then a final one just when the event appears to be over [like a beautiful craft cocktail greeting].”

—Christie Altendorf

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**LISA ANDERSON:** “In the last three years we’ve seen that décor is still important, but budget cuts are going to come from décor before they come from food and beverage. We’ve seen that since the economic recovery of ‘08 to where we are now, clients are back to spending what they were on food and beverage and more.”

**JOHN DOODY:** “We’re also seeing clients finding unique ways to stretch their food and beverage budget to double as décor by finding interesting ways to plate, present and design dishes as a main focal point. We’ve especially seen this with dishes like desserts used and decorated as these amazing, edible centerpieces.”



## BETTER IN PAIRS

“Pairings are a great reflection of what people tend to gravitate towards these days—satisfying all of the senses. While this absolutely means finding harmony between flavors, it also means presenting things in a way that pleases the eye or leads with an enticing aroma. Classic pairings such as a petite lobster roll with a dry rosé or a tiny Juicy Lucy with a local craft beer are definitely favorites, but it’s always fun to play with bolder flavors and colors too, such as pairing a spicy jack fruit taco with a sweet prickly pear margarita.”

—Christie Altendorf



## LEAVING MINIMALISM FOR ABUNDANCE

“We’ve mostly moved away from modern, precise minimalism in presentation and are trending towards opulent and bountiful displays. Whether it is a table filled with cured meats, artisanal cheeses, olives, nuts, whole fruits, edible flowers, fresh herbs and heritage grain breads or petite desserts that are displayed in multiples enhanced with props, greenery and platters made from a variety of metals and woods, presentation right now is designed to give the guest a sense of lavishness and abundance.”

—Christie Altendorf



**EVENT SNAPSHOT**  
*D'Amico Family Dinner*

**D'**Amico gathered together an intimate group of people to simply enjoy the things that drive the industry: a beautiful setting, delicious menu, great atmosphere and even better people. Girl Friday, Munster Rose and Linen Effects helped create an intentional space at the Calhoun Beach Club that was cozy while embracing the lush nature of the summer season.

The night started with passed hors d'oeuvres from D'Amico Catering's new menu, including the tuna Nicoise taco and a mezcal-cured salmon on homemade potato chip with citrus yogurt and chili threads. A bubble bar with Dom Pérignon and Veuve Clicquot was set under a canopy of lush greens with suspended bubbles holding small candles.

The group then transitioned into the second half of the space

that had been disguised behind a wall of boxwood to sit down for a family-style meal. Guests were greeted with an amuse bouche of cucumber cup with melon caviar, paired with a pineapple cucumber agua fresca. Favorite courses included the beet-marinated halibut, hand-rolled gnocchi with truffled cream and "crab cakes" created from hearts of palm.

Petite desserts were served under the same lush canopy as the champagne, with the glass bubbles now holding salted caramel budinos and delightful hibiscus glazed mini donuts.

Everyone left with a thoughtful swag bag that contained a thank-you note, iced coffee, D'Amico's signature cranberry nut bread, under-eye patches and a chilled bottle of water; a bag of buttery popcorn was waiting in guests' cars, too.



## ALWAYS ROOM FOR DESSERT

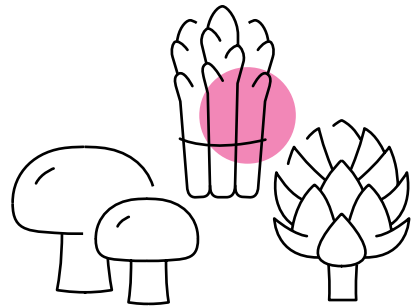
"More and more we're seeing clients asking for sweet endings that have a savory side, like a goat cheese panna cotta with compote cherries or a guava cheesecake with spiced cashew crust. Beautiful desserts that are also vegan are coming into play, focusing on ingredients like aquafaba, coconut, tapioca and black beans. We recently created a dessert pairing bar for a client that offered sweet bites with fun sips: a s'mores tartlet with a dark oatmeal stout, a tiny apple pastry with an Oregon Riesling, and a creamy fall-spiced pumpkin tartlet with a single malt scotch.

"This suspended sweet station [page 51] was a fun way to end an intimate, event community-focused event that we recently produced. While cliché, it's 100 percent true that we eat with our eyes first and to create a dessert display that used miniature bites done in a vertical, lush setting, our hope was to satiate the creative side of our guests before we did the same for their sweet tooth."

—Christie Altendorf

"[Pastry chef] Kachu Yang was raised in France. ... We were opening [Hyatt Regency Bloomington-Minneapolis] and I knew I wanted to make our pastries from scratch, so we did a simple search and she walked in and she was one of those few people that as soon as she walked in the door, I was not going to let her walk out without actually having her on the staff. It's very hard today to find a truly well-trained pastry chef that's willing to be creative. She fits that mold. We give her a lot of latitude. I really give her buckets to fill instead of telling her specifics. She's not Norwegian or Scandinavian, but she absolutely mastered several of the classic pastries like stroopwafels. I don't know of another property in the Twin Cities where you can have a coffee and stroopwafel as a side."

—Paul Lynch



## Out with the Old In with the New

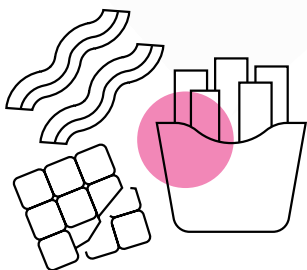
### LINDSAY FRANK

"I think we are finally seeing the end of the Mason jar (whether it was décor or a vessel for food) and I don't think there is a single person in the industry that is upset about it. Another trend on its way out is bacon. Yes, people are still going to eat it if served (as breakfast or a donut topping), but there are new meat options that people are choosing more—hello pork belly (bacon's chunkier cousin)!

"People still love donuts. We do a ton of them and every event people go crazy for them. I think that is here to stay for a while.

"One trend we have done a lot of is the food-station concept. While this has been present in the industry for several years, we are serving them consistently without a single sit-down meal. People respond great to being served multiple, smaller meals during the day versus a hearty breakfast, lunch and dinner when they are attending an all-day (or week) conference.

"There will continue to be a huge surge in plant-based protein. People are eating less meat and are working to find ways to create a diet with more fruits and vegetables. The catering industry needs to work to create menus for clients that highlight such options—without thinking of vegetable entrees as an alternative for someone who doesn't eat meat."



## Choose Your Own Food Adventure

"When it comes to guest interactivity, it's important to give people a sense of being in control of their own destiny. Think back to the '90s and the ability to pick a variety of different endings to a scary story. A great illustration of this is an event that we did a bit ago that elevated a 'fry bar' and gave guests choices of several different types of French fries and tater tots, and then challenged them to come up with the best possible flavor fusion. The winningest combination turned out to be crispy waffle fries, chocolate fudge and bacon bits." —Christie Altendorf

## Q&A WITH A CICERONE:

### **MICHAEL AGNEW** *A Perfect Pint*

#### **How did A Perfect Pint get its start?**

I started A Perfect Pint in 2007. At the time I had developed an almost obsessive interest in beer. The big craft beer boom had not yet begun. I sensed though, that something big was about to happen. I wanted to be part of it, but I didn't want to sell it or make it. Most of my other occupations have involved education of some kind. I thought that I could carry that over to beer.

#### **How does one of your tastings go?**

I usually try to pour something pilsner-like to start. There is always a malt-forward beer, a hop-forward beer, and a beer that derives its main flavors from fermentation and yeast. Beyond that I try to include something with roasted grains and something that will push guests' understanding of what beer can be.

#### **What's your response when someone says they don't like beer?**

I hear this all the time and my response is always the same: You haven't tasted all beer. The range of flavors in beer is so broad that there really is a beer for everyone. You just have to find it. Most people who say that have the idea that all beer tastes like plain American lagers. During my tastings, they discover that there is so much more. I have had so many supposed beer haters at the end of an event say, "I loved everything you poured."

#### **What does the future of beer look like?**

"Local" is likely to remain big. Drinkers now more and more eschew national and regional craft brands in favor of what's brewed in their city or neighborhood. While I think this is generally a good thing, the downside is the loss of some world-class beers from other regions and countries. The selection of imports has become extremely limited. With that limitation comes a reduction in the styles of beer available. I think it's a real problem.

#### **Do you like beer or wine with food?**

Beer is in many ways a better accompaniment for food than wine. The range of flavors is wider. The flavors include distinctly food-like profiles—toast, coffee, chocolate, caramel, roast, fruit, sourness, sweetness, bitterness, etc. And many of those flavors result from the same chemical reactions that occur in food when it is cooked. They aren't just similar flavors, they are the same flavors. Additionally, beer brewers can add other ingredients to beer to make it taste like just about anything. With beer/food pairings, the possibilities really are endless. I can't think of a single food that couldn't be beautifully paired with a beer.



#### *Get Connected*

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*A Perfect Pint is a full-service beer education and consulting company. Michael Agnew specializes in beer tasting events and beer dinners, beer education classes, foodservice staff training and beer writing.*





**EVENT SNAPSHOT**

***Twin Cities NACE 2018 National Conference Recap***

Twin Cities NACE recreated two events from the 2018 NACE Experience conference in Palm Springs, California, for its recap event. Complete with tapestry tones, glitter tattoos and jalapeno margaritas, the night’s opening reception paid homage to the conference’s Coachella theme. The dinner portion riffed on the conference’s closing gala dinner art deco venue: the historic Riviera Palm Springs. Event Lab brought the event to life through décor and design. Menu items highlighted the era and served with a traditional cocktail—the sidecar.

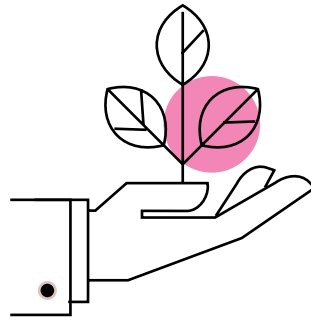
**BAR SERVICE**

“People are increasingly more and better educated when it comes to wines. Less and less do we see clients who are satisfied serving their guests low tiered wines that don’t do justice to the experience of the food. More often, we see requests for interesting and less traditional wines likes Gruner Veltliner or Cabernet Franc which are fun to create menus around and enhance the overall integrity of the event.

“We’re seeing more station concepts that focus on one type of drink, but done in different ways. A bubble bar might feature a range of different sparkling wines, whether they’re produced by small farmers in France or large champagne houses in California. An Old-Fashioned bar should definitely include a great rye whisky, but also leave room for an aged rum. Bloody mary bars are nothing new, but one that allows guests to create their own garnish from a variety of junk food (think pretzels, onion rings, jerky, chicken wings and cheese curds) are an interesting approach to a concept that has been a staple at events for years.” —Christie Altendorf



PHOTOS: NACE, COURTNEY JUNE PHOTOGRAPHY; D'AMICO CATERING, LAURA RAE PHOTOGRAPHY



## ZERO WASTE

### *Kelber Catering on ...*

#### **SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS:**

**LA:** “We spend a lot of time sourcing new sustainable products, whether it’s finding products that will look decent while serving 4,000 salads or looks appetizing in a to-go container or products that are compostable and will hold up over time. It’s amazing what John and his team have been able to source.”

**JD:** “We got rid of plastic straws over 12 years ago. All of our coffee cups and lids, soufflé cups, stir sticks—it’s all compostable. We use sugar cane plates, which are compostable and our disposable cutlery is all compostable as well.”

#### **BECOMING LEED CERTIFIED:**

**LA:** “Our building is Green Meeting Industry Council certified and we also received our LEED certification in 2017. When I started with Kelber 27 years ago, and even before I came on board, Kelber was saving unused food for local food shelves. As we went forward, all of our waste food was captured and also sent to hog farms. We did all of this before the building was environmentally conscious. We wanted to take care of our local food community and make sure our food was being utilized as best

as possible. The building started a process about 7 years ago with really aggressive recycling. Our kitchen also triple sorts.”

**JD:** “We also filter and save the oil from our deep fryers to be picked up and turned into soap products. We partner with People Serving People (PSP) to share our waste food. The organization comes daily to collect what we haven’t used. The best part is if PSP can’t use it, they’re also a distribution center, but we also partner with Youthlink—another nonprofit that we provide food to, depending on their needs at the time. Food that’s been sitting on buffets goes into buckets and is collected by local pig farmers to make feed.”

#### **THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX:**

**LA:** “Our purchasing director has invented this new wine cup for us that’s completely compostable. When we serve wine in those glasses you’d never imagine they were sustainable, which is perfect for us. We’re able to work toward an eco-friendly mission without sacrificing style or sophistication in presentation.”

#### **LINDSAY FRANK**

“Eating nose to tail is an up-and-coming focus—not wasting parts of an animal that are viewed as lower quality. A lot of menus are going to start featuring things like cow cheeks, chicken feet and ox tail.”

#### **LEAH ANDERSON**

“Mintahoe has been slowly integrating sustainable initiatives into our everyday operations, such as focusing on compostable serviceware or using real china instead of disposable. We are also continuing to improve our efforts every day with recycling and lowering food waste.”



**Q&A WITH AN ICE CREAM  
LOVER:**

**WALLY O'WONKA**

**How did you get your start?**

Leprechaun's Dreamcycle started as fulfillment of a dream I'd had since I was a kid watching commercials pitching The Good Humor Man. I snooped around eBay and found the vehicle that would change my life for the better forever. The Dreamcycle is decorated with handmade logos of 20 or so local businesses who enjoy the positive visibility that ice cream and balloon animals provide.

**Do you work events?**

While I began selling ice cream on the streets of St Paul, the brand has changed to almost exclusively hosted events, meetings, parties, weddings (I can officiate as well), block parties, festivals and whatnot. I am capable of doing my thing indoors or out and The Dreamcycle can go anywhere a wheelchair can go. I often roll through cube farms and greet the employees at their desks with the jingle of my bells. Employees don't have to stop work to be a part of the party. I travel all over the state and even got an RV to allow me to take the show on the road.

**What treats do you serve?**

I don't have fancy flavors, I have nostalgic flavors. I have a little rocket that is cherry, lemon-lime and huckleberry. You can choose a chocolate-covered vanilla or ice cream sandwich. The push pops and Dreamsicles will remind you of childhood and stir fond memories.

**Other than ice cream, what do you bring to events?**

I've been brought to several communities with the expressed purpose of improving morale. Ice cream does the heavy lifting, but I'll do my part. I'll notice everyone I interact with and give each person time to have a moment of good feelings. And if a group is already feeling groovy, I can probably add another layer.

**Tell us about your look.**

I have two outfits that I wear when serving treats. I have seersucker that keeps me cool or woolen hunting knickers that keep me warm. Heimie's Haberdashery is responsible for making me look like one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's pals.



**Get Connected**

LEPRECHAUN'S DREAMCYCLE

leprechaunsdreamcycle.com

*“  
Leprechaun's  
Dreamcycle is  
photogenic. Our  
interaction is personal.  
There is no counter  
between you and me and  
we'll see eye to eye.  
”*



PHOTOS: ST. PAUL PHOTO CO.; BALLOONS COURTESY OF ANAGRAM BALLOONS; (OPPOSITE) JAMES MICHAEL KRUGER; COPPERSMITH PHOTOGRAPHY



# STRAW BALE GARDENING

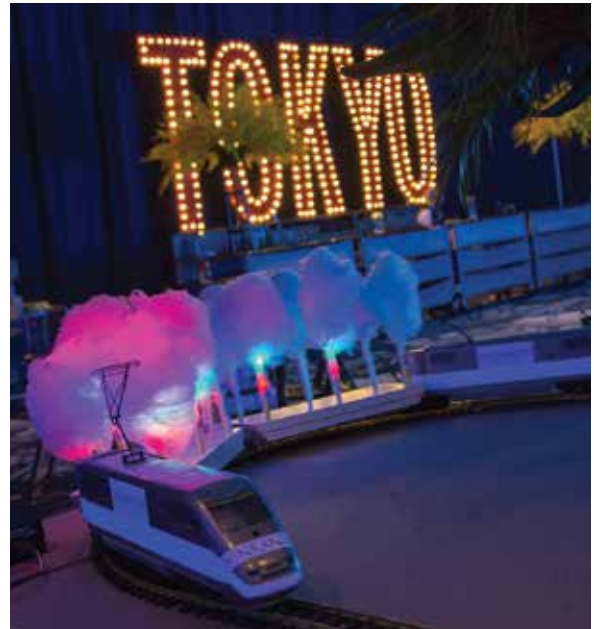
## PAUL LYNCH

“When looking at what I wanted to do with Urbana Craeft Kitchen & Market, I wanted to take that next step [from farm to table] to garden to table, that it’s grow your own, that it’s really developing the tenets of permaculture—the concept that food should not be the farm’s over there and the city here and the two shall never meet; the concept that food production should be throughout the society.

“If we look at how food was brought to the table prior to World War II, probably close to 70 percent of the food that we consumed came from our own backyards. Everybody had their vegetable gardens—it was very much interspersed through society. And we’ve segregated it ever since.

“I wanted to show how easy it was for us to do a garden and for it to be part of our culture near the hotel. I went to our owners [with the request], and they said, ‘We’re developing this whole 50-acre site, so we can give you a piece of land for you to put your garden now, but you may not be able to have your garden there next year.’ I can’t be moving my garden every single year. At the [Minnesota] State Fair, many years ago, I remembered seeing something about straw bale gardens. I looked it up and said, ‘This is a really good situation here.’ So I convinced the management team here and their ownership that we should go ahead and try straw bale gardening because then if we needed to move the garden, it wouldn’t make a difference because I could just buy new straw bales.

“This is the third year we’ve had the straw bale garden and we’ve had tremendous success. I increased it by 25 percent the first year to the second year, and then increased it 100-fold, or double the size, last year to this year. We’re able to grow a pretty good variety of crops. I actually think about what I want to do with the menu and then we grow the food to fit within that; it’s a fun little chess game I get to play every winter.”



## Inspiration

### LEAH ANDERSON

“[Events like the Minnesota Star Awards] are the kinds of events that challenge us creatively and logistically, but in the end are so worth it. For the Star Awards our inspiration came from the theme of the room we’d be serving in, which was a Tokyo theme, so we pulled ideas from things we know in and about Tokyo. The bullet train, street vendors ... things like that. Our process typically involves lengthy meetings to throw out ideas (no matter how crazy they are), creating a dream list that’s narrowed down based on logistics, budget or audience, many meetings to go over details and plan out décor from vendor partners, then day-of we have a blast pulling it all together.”

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**JOHN DOODY:** “We try to put our heads together and make creating new dishes a collaborative process. We use in-house tastings to decide on potential new dishes and possible pairings that might make for a good fit from the existing menu.”

**LISA ANDERSON:** “John and his team look for inspiration everywhere, whether it’s a local restaurant or a client dinner or anything that might catch their attention or that they might find intriguing, it’s something the team will come back and say ‘OK, let’s research this. Let’s see what we can turn this into.’”

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**LINDSAY FRANK:** “Instagram is where I follow the most companies and food blogs. I love local ones that showcase what is in our backyard. It usually is a good glimpse of what our clients are dining on when they go to a restaurant. I love Mouth Meets MPLS on Instagram.”